

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2263

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMOONSUL HONG KONG 1554

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

UNCLAS KUALA LUMPUR 0311

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SUBJ: TRANSITION: HUSSEIN ONN ACCENTS CONTINUITY

REF: KL 0281 (DTG 150520Z JAN 76),

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1. SUMMARY: JAN 17 MEETINGS OF UMNO AND NATIONAL FRONT CONFIRM NEW PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN'S ROLE AS "ACTING" UMNO PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL FRONT COALITION. PRIME MINISTER STRESSES NO POWER STRUGGLES UNDERWAY IN UMNO AND NATIONAL FRONT AND STATES HE IS IN "NO HURRY" TO NAME DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OR RESHUFFLE CABINET, ALTHOUGH SECURITY MATTERS MAY GET SPECIAL ATTENTION. FOREIGN POLICY WILL
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FOCUS ON REGIONAL COOPERATION THROUGH ASEAN. IN

CONTEXT OF CONCERN OVER HIS HEALTH, HUSSEIN ONN'S PRIVATE PHYSICIAN REPORTED HE HAD GIVEN NEW PM "CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH" AND SAW NO HEALTH REASONS MILITATING AGAINST HIS ASSUMING POST OF PM.
END SUMMARY.

2. JAN 17 MEETING OF UMNO (UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION) SUPREME COUNCIL CONFIRMED AFFIRMED APPOINTMENT OF NEW PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN AS UMNO "ACTING PRESIDENT" UNTIL NEXT PARTY ELECTION IN 1978. IN A SUBSEQUENT UNSCHEDULED PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE COUNCIL AND NATIONAL FRONT MEETINGS, DATUK HUSSEIN NOTED THAT ACCORDING TO THE UMNO CONSTITUTION, THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF UMNO SHALL SERVE AS "ACTING PRESIDENT" IN THE EVENT OF THE UMNO PRESIDENT'S DEATH OR RESIGNATION UNTIL THE PARTY'S NEXT ELECTION, HELD EVERY THREE YEARS. THEREFORE, HE SAW NO REASON FOR ACTION UNTIL JUNE 1978.

3. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL SESSION, SUPREME COUNCIL OF BARISAN NASIONAL (NATIONAL FRONT -- THE MULTI-PARTY RULING COALITION IN WHICH UMNO IS THE DOMINANT COMPONENT) "CONFIRMED" AN EARLIER AGREEMENT AMONG THE LEADERS OF THE COMPONENT PARTIES TO ACCEPT DATUK HUSSEIN AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BARISAN NASIONAL.

4. FOLLOWING THE TWO MEETINGS, BOTH OF WHICH HELD AT HIS RESIDENCE, DATUK HUSSEIN ONN IN IMPROMPTU PRESS CONFERENCE ACCENTED CONTINUITY ASPECTS OF HIS SUCCESSION TO PRIME MINISTERSHIP. "THERE IS NO BREAK IN THE GOVERNMENT FROM THE MOMENT OF TUN RAZAK'S DEATH. THERE IS NO CRISIS OR DIFFERENCE OF OPINION WITH REGARD TO THIS LEADERSHIP OF UMNO AND THE NATIONAL FRONT. THERE IS NO POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN UMNO OR THE NATIONAL FRONT AS SOME PEOPLE TEND TO BELIEVE," DATUK HUSSEIN DECLARED. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD TAKEN OVER THE FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE FOR THE TIME BEING, STATING THAT "THERE IS NO HURRY TO NAME THE DEPUTY PRIME
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MINISTER." HE ALSO INDICATED THAT HE WAS IN NO HURRY TO RESHUFFLE HIS CABINET, ALTHOUGH HE DID SAY HE WOULD DEVOTE MORE ATTENTION TO SECURITY MATTERS.
(COMMENT: THIS MEANS THAT HUSSEIN ONN CURRENTLY HOLDS FOLLOWING PORTFOLIOS: DEFENSE, FINANCE, AND COORDINATION OF PUBLIC CORPORATIONS.)

5. ON BROADER ISSUES, THE NEW PRIME MINISTER INDICATED

HIS FOREIGN POLICY WOULD FOCUS ON INCREASED REGIONAL COOPERATION UNDER AUSPICES OF ASEAN. RE DOMESTIC POLICY HE SAID, "I READILY SUPPORT THE LATE TUN'S IDEAS OF LESSENING TENSION AND CREATING CONDITIONS OF PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE COUNTRY." HE ALSO INDICATED THAT THE NATIONAL FRONT GOVERNMENT WOULD INCORPORATE ITS "PHILOSOPHY, POLICIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF A JUST SOCIETY" IN THE THIRD MALAYSIA PLAN WHICH WOULD BE ANNOUNCED A FEW MONTHS HENCE.

6. ON THE MEDICAL SIDE, HUSSEIN ONN'S PRIVATE PHYSICIAN TOLD REPORTERS JAN 17 THAT PRIOR TO BEING SWORN IN AS PM HUSSEIN HAD CALLED TO ASK WHETHER HE WAS MEDICALLY FIT AND HAD BEEN TOLD BY THE DOCTOR THAT "THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO MEDICAL REASON WHY HE SHOULD NOT ACCEPT THE PREMIERSHIP." THE DOCTOR SAID SPECULATION HAD ARISEN REGARDING HUSSEIN'S HEALTH BECAUSE HE WAS NOT SECRETIVE ABOUT HIS REGULAR CHECKUPS. THE DOCTOR ALSO SAID THE NEW PM KEPT HIMSELF SLIM AS PREFERRED BY HIS MEDICAL ADVISORS.
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